

1. Importance of Physical Activity for Youth

Regular physical activity improves health and reduces the risk of developing many chronic diseases including cardiovascular disease, hypertension, overweight and obesity, osteoporosis, diabetes, and certain cancers. Although children and adolescents are generally more active than adults, many still do not meet the recommended guidelines for physical activity. In 2005, 9.6 percent of students in grades 9-12 did not engage in moderate or vigorous physical activity.

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Benefits of Physical Activity for Adolescents

Physical activity can help:

- improve aerobic capacity, flexibility, and muscular strength and endurance;
- lower lipid and cholesterol levels;
- decrease blood pressure in adolescents with borderline hypertension (high blood pressure);
- control weight;
- increase self-esteem and lower levels of anxiety and stress; and
- build bone mass.

Physical Activity Recommendation for Children and Adolescents

The recommendation for children and adolescents is 60 minutes of physical activity on most, preferably all, days of the week. This includes moderate activity, such as playing basketball, soccer, swimming, or running, and physical activity as part of everyday life, such as doing household chores, walking to and from school, or taking the stairs instead of the elevator.

2. Your Role in Promoting Physical Activity

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Modern conveniences such as cordless phones, remote control devices, video games, the Internet, and accessible transportation as well as environmental challenges (e.g., lack of sidewalks in neighborhoods, poor lighting) have contributed to a decline in the overall physical activity levels in both adults and youth. Although we make many excuses for remaining sedentary, it is easy to incorporate physical activity into our daily schedules. Here are some ways to encourage youth in your program to be more physically active.

Keep Them Moving

Make physical activity an integral part of your programs, meetings, and events. Begin each session with an interactive physical activity icebreaker. Have youth get up, stretch, and move around during breaks and allow them to be physically active after serving lunch or dinner. It takes only a few minutes to lead a stretching activity or do a set of jumping jacks. Research shows that increasing circulation and blood flow to the brain can improve concentration and performance.

Promote Lifelong Physical Activity

1. Teach youth the health benefits and importance of regular physical activity.
2. Help youth develop the knowledge, attitudes, and skills they need to adopt and maintain a physically active lifestyle. Provide opportunities for them to practice lifelong activities such as walking, running, jumping rope, swimming, bicycling, or skating.
3. Encourage youth to be physically active by providing examples of how they can fit more activity into their daily schedules. Youth can add physical activity into their routines by walking or riding their bikes to and from school, to friends' houses, or to the store; taking the stairs; and helping out with chores such as mowing the lawn, gardening, or washing the car.

Plan a Special Event That Highlights Physical Activity

Walk-a-thons, dances, or sports tournaments are great fundraising activities that also promote physical activity messages. Get youth, parents, community members, and local businesses and agencies involved in planning and participating in the event. For a parent picnic, why not organize a friendly young people vs. elders basketball or volleyball game? These events are great ways to promote physical activity and have youth share health information with their parents and the community.

Join Forces

Find out what physical activity opportunities (e.g., sports leagues, recreation centers, private gyms) are available for youth in your area and explore ways to support each other. A community program or local business might be willing to provide sponsorship or resources for physical activities, while your program can provide referrals.

Get Parents Involved

Reinforcement of a physically active lifestyle is key to adopting it permanently. Encourage parents and guardians to support their children's participation in physical activity, to be physically active role models, and to include physical activity in family events.

Set an Example

Be physically active yourself. Be enthusiastic while demonstrating and participating in physical activities, and remember that your actions are a powerful influence.

3. Tips for Successful Physical Activity Sessions

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Before you organize and implement a physical activity and/or game, keep in mind the following tips:

Get Their Attention

Get everyone's attention before you explain the details/rules of the activity. Always make sure to say the "when" before the "what." For example, "When I say go, I want everybody to grab a ball."

Make Sure Everyone Is Involved

Avoid games such as baseball and kickball that require half of participants to sit and wait for their turn. Find ways to modify a physical activity to include everyone (e.g., have more equipment available or play games with smaller teams).

Give Concise Instructions and Provide Supervision

Be brief and to the point. Get the physical activity started on time! Be available to clarify instructions and provide feedback for those who need it during the physical activity.

Emphasize Physical Activity and Enjoyment Over Competition

Competitive sports are a good source of physical activity, but they are not for all youth. Make sure to offer a wide range of competitive and noncompetitive physical activities for a variety of abilities. This will help youth develop the skills and confidence to participate.

Be Enthusiastic

Get involved with the physical activity in order to demonstrate the appropriate behavior. Show that physical activity is important to you as well.

Be Creative

Not all physical activity requires expensive equipment. Use what is available. For example, soup cans and water jugs can serve as weights during strength-training activities.

4. Games for Small Spaces

These physical activities are great icebreakers for the beginning of meetings.

Activity	Description	Time Requirement	Equipment
Learning Names			
Find Someone Who*	Youth attempt to complete the questions on their handout by finding other youth who know the answer to various questions. When they identify someone who knows an answer, they must have them sign their list. One signature per person. <i>(Please refer to the end of this section for the handout.)</i>	5 to 10 minutes	<i>Find Someone Who</i> Handout
Name Game*	Participants learn group members' names while practicing hand-eye and ball-tossing coordination skills <i>(Please refer to the end of this section for a detailed description.)</i>	5 to 10 minutes (depending on group size)	Name tags; soft throwable objects such as balls, bean bags
Switching Places*	Youth are divided into groups. A group leader calls out two names. Those identified exchange places while the leader attempts to occupy a vacated space. Whoever is left out of the circle calls two more names.	10 minutes	None
Cooperative Games			
Knots*	Youth form a human knotted circle and attempt to unravel themselves while holding hands.	10 minutes	None
Houdini Hoops*	Youth form a circle holding hands and attempt to see how quickly they can move a hoop around their circle without letting go of their hands.	5 to 10 minutes	Large size hoops
Clean Your Room*	Each team attempts to keep their "room" the cleanest by removing objects from one side and throwing them onto the other. Participants are active and moving while practicing coordination and throwing. <i>(Please refer to the end of this section for a detailed description.)</i>	5 to 10 minutes	Soft objects (at least 1 per participant, e.g., foam balls, bean bags, crumpled-up recyclable paper), boom box, whistle, 4 cones, long rope
Activities to Increase Flexibility and Strength			
	<i>(Please refer to the end of this section for detailed descriptions.)</i>	5 minutes each	None
<i>*From: SPARK Physical Education, San Diego State University</i>			

Find Someone Who...

Plays on his school's basketball team _____

Has met a professional athlete _____

Will do 10 jumping jacks with you _____

Can list three Women's National Basketball Association teams

Can name a female Olympian in track and field _____

Can name a male Olympian in track and field _____

Can name a baseball player in Major League baseball _____

Will hop on one foot 10 times _____

Has a family member with diabetes _____

Has a family member with heart disease _____

Gets 1 hour of moderate physical activity (e.g., walking, biking, swimming, jogging) at least 5 days/week _____

Can name three vegetables that are high in vitamin A

Can name three fruits that are high in vitamin C

Can name three foods high in fiber

Walks to school every morning _____

From: SPARK Physical Education, San Diego State University

Name Game

Purpose

- To allow participants to learn each other's name.
- To practice hand-eye and ball-tossing coordination skills.

Time

5 to 10 minutes (depending on group size)

Materials

Name tags

Soft, throwable objects such as balls, bean bags, any other implements that won't hurt

Activity

Have participants make a circle. Ideally, each should have a name tag on.

Part 1: Leader begins by stepping forward into the circle and says his first name. All others repeat it out loud in unison to remember it. The leader steps back. Each person follows the leader, stepping forward, saying his name, waiting until the others repeat it, and then steps back.

Part 2: Add ball-tossing element (can also use a bean bag or other light tossable objects).

- Prompt each person to call the other person's name and make sure he has his attention before tossing or rolling the object to him.
- Catcher says, "thank you" using the other person's name.
- Encourage all to participate.

Part 3: After people seem to know the rules, add more balls/bean bags to speed up the activity.

Part 4: Take away all implements. Everyone covers his name tag. Repeat Part 1, but now see if others can say the person's name without the person saying it first. Take a few minutes at the conclusion of the game to discuss: what does this game teach besides names (i.e., social skills, not tossing something at someone until she/he is ready, proper form for tossing—shoulders square, face the person).

From: SPARK Physical Education, San Diego State University

Clean Your Room

Purpose

- Get youth moving and physically active.
- General coordination, throwing.

Time

5 to 10 minutes

Prepare

Designate a 30' x 30' physical activity area and divide the area in half with a rope or string.

Materials

One soft object per participant (e.g., bean bags, soft balls)

Boom box

Whistle

Four cones

Long rope

Activity

1. Divide youth into two groups.
2. Place half of the soft objects on the floor in front of each group's physical activity area.
3. At the start cue (whistle or music), each side will clean their room by throwing the soft objects over to the other side as fast as they can. The object of the game is to have the cleanest room.
4. On the stop signal (whistle cue, music stop), participants make an "x" with their body (i.e., jumping jack stance) and drop any objects in their hands. Count the remaining balls left on each side to determine which team has the cleanest room.

From: SPARK Physical Education, San Diego State University

Activities to Increase Flexibility

Quad Stretch

Sit on the floor with the soles of your feet together. Gently move your upper body forward until you feel a slight stretch in the groin area. Keep head up and back straight. Hold for 10 seconds and release.



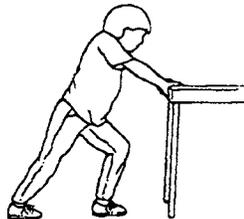
Flamingo Stretch*

This stretch is like a flamingo bird who stands on one leg. Hold onto the back of a chair and bend one leg up behind you. Reach back and hold the ankle with your free hand, slowly and gently pull it toward your buttocks. Hold for 10 seconds and release. Repeat with the other leg.



Desk Stretch*

Hold onto the desk with one foot 12 inches behind the other foot. Slowly move your hips forward, keeping the heel of the back leg flat on the ground. You should feel a slight stretch in the calf muscles. Keep head up and back straight. Hold for 10 seconds and release. Repeat with the other leg.



I Love Me Stretch

Standing with your legs slightly apart, cross your arms in front, gently reach as far as possible behind your shoulders and give yourself the biggest hug you can! Hold for 10 seconds and release. This is a good stretch to do anytime!



Tree Limb Stretch

Stand erect as if you were a tall tree, with one arm out in front of you as if it were a tree limb. With your other arm, gently bring elbow of the limb arm across your chest toward the opposite shoulder. Hold for 10 seconds and relax. Repeat with the other arm.



Remember to:

- Stop if you feel any pain.
- Hold each stretch steadily—no bouncing!
- Breathe normally.

* Make sure that the desks or chairs are secure or pushed against a wall.

This material is from "Choose A Healthy Lifestyle" curriculum prepared by Washington Apple Commission (1993).

Activities to Increase Strength

Chest Press

While sitting at desk, put palms together, chest high. Push hands together as hard as you can for 10 seconds. Rest, then repeat seven times.



Desk Press

While sitting at desk, place hands (palms down) on desk. Press down as hard as you can for 10 seconds. Rest, then repeat seven times.



Quad Squat*

Stand to the side of the desk with one hand grasping the desk. Slowly bend down only to the point where the thighs (top of your leg) are parallel with the floor. Do eight knee bends.



Straight Leg Flexion*

Stand to the side of the desk, with one hand grasping the desk. The weight is on the supporting leg. Lift the leg in front without leaning forward or backward. Hold for six seconds. Return to starting position and repeat on the other side. Do eight repetitions.



Desk Dips*

Face away from desk, hands grasping the edge of the desk with feet slightly forward so the weight of the body is off center to the back. Lower the body only until the knees are slightly bent. Do eight desk dips.



Reverse Desk Press*

While sitting at desk, place hands under the desk, with palms facing upward. Push up as hard as you can for 10 seconds. Rest, then repeat seven times.



Rear Leg Extension*

Stand to the side of the desk, with one hand grasping the desk. The weight is just forward of the slightly bent supporting leg. The working leg should be raised straight behind, only as far as possible without tipping the upper body forward. Hold for six seconds. Return to starting position and repeat on the other side. Do eight repetitions.



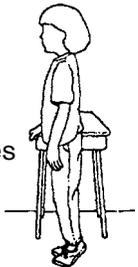
Desk Push-Up*

Face the desk, hands grasping the edge of the desk. Place feet away from desk approximately one to two feet. Lower the body until the chest touches the desk and then come back up. Do eight push-ups.



Tip Toe Heel Raises*

Stand to the side of the desk, with one hand grasping the desk. Raise up high on your toes then back down. Do eight heel raises.



*Remember to:

- Make sure that the desks are secure, or pushed against a wall.
- Breathe out on the hard part of the movement.

* Make sure that the desks or chairs are secure, or pushed against a wall.

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